

APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT SCREENING REPORT FOR PLANNING APPLICATIONS



Screening is used to determine if an AA is necessary by examining:

- If the plan / project is directly connected with / necessary to the management of the European site.
- If the effects will be significant on a European site in view of its conservation objectives, either alone / in combination with other plans / projects.

Planning Authority: Offaly County Council

Planning Application Proposed Part VIII

Tullamore Municipal District.

(A) DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT AND LOCAL SITE:			
Proposed development:	Proposal to undertake Re-Furbishment / Upgrade of Existing Bus Stops at Church Street, Clara, County Offaly.		
Site location:	Church Street, Clara, County Offaly.		
Site size:	0.050 Hectares	Floor Area of Proposed Development:	N/A
Identification of nearby European Site(s):	European Site - Split Hills & Long Hill Esker (Site Code = 001831)		
Distance to European Site(s):	11km		
The characteristics of existing, proposed or other approved plans / projects which may cause interactive / cumulative impacts with the project being assessed and which may affect the site:	Given the limited scale of the development applied for it is not considered that it will have any interactive / cumulative impacts with any other plan or project in the vicinity.		
Is the application accompanied by an EIAR?	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/>	No: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

(B) IDENTIFICATION OF THE RELEVANT European sites (S):

The reasons for the designation of the European sites (s):	
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Split Hills and Long Hill Esker is a 5 km long site which crosses the main Galway-Dublin road mid-way between Kilbeggan and Tyrrellspass in Co. Westmeath. It is a prominent feature on the local landscape.

The site is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) selected for the following habitats and/or species listed on Annex I / II of the E.U. Habitats Directive (* = priority; numbers in brackets are Natura 2000 codes):

[6210] Orchid-rich Calcareous Grassland*

Split Hill and Long Hill Esker is one of the finest and longest wooded eskers in the country. It is also one of the few woodlands in the area and a fine geomorphological feature of great scenic value. The trees are particularly well-grown and impressive, and much of the woodland has developed naturally on its steep slopes. The presence of a species-rich ground flora, which includes a rare and legally protected plant species at its only known Irish location, makes this site of great botanical and ecological importance. The site also supports some excellent examples of calcareous grassland which is rich in orchids. The increasing rarity of this habitat (due to agricultural intensification) is recognised in that it is awarded priority status on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive.

The conservation objectives / qualifying interests of the site and the factors that contributes to the conservation value of the site: (which are taken from the European sites synopses and, if applicable, a Conservation Management Plan; all available on www.npws.ie) **(ATTACH INFO.)**

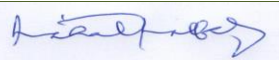
The main habitat at this site is semi-natural woodland dominated by Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*). Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*), Wych Elm (*Ulmus glabra*) and Irish Whitebeam (*Sorbus hibernica*) are other important constituents. There are very fine examples of these trees throughout the site, with some of the Hazel trees, in particular, being impressive. The ground flora is species-rich and includes Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*), Enchanter's-nightshade (*Circaea lutetiana*), Golden-saxifrage (*Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*), Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), Ground-ivy (*Glechoma hederacea*), Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*) and other typical woodland plants. The scarce woodland grass, Wood Fescue (*Festuca altissima*), is present, and the scarce Bird's-nest Orchid (*Neottia nidus-avis*) has also been recorded here. The presence of Wych Elm is interesting in view of its decline due to Dutch elm disease. Several areas of species-rich calcareous grassland occur, with typical calcicole species such as Yellow-wort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*), Carlina Thistle (*Carlina vulgaris*), Mountain Everlasting (*Antennaria dioica*) and Early-purple Orchid (*Orchis mascula*). These occur on unstable old and active quarry faces, and on cleared woodland areas.

Areas of scrub with Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) occur, and regenerating Hazel scrub exists in some areas where woodland has been cleared. Other habitats in the site include a small lake and freshwater marsh with Slender Sedge (*Carex lasiocarpa*).

Narrow-leaved Bitter-cress (*Cardamine impatiens*) occurs among the woodland flora at this site. It is an annual or biennial, whose populations are known to 'disappear' in some years only to 'reappear' again. The species is protected under the Flora (Protection) Order, 1999, and this is its only known location in Ireland. Another legally protected species, Red Hemp-nettle (*Galeopsis angustifolia*), occurs on more open ground on the esker.

(C) NPWS ADVICE:

Advice received from NPWS over phone:	None received.
Summary of advice received from NPWS in written form	-
(ATTACH SAME):	

(D) ASSESSMENT OF LIKELY SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS:	
<p>(The purpose of this is to identify if the effect(s) identified could be significant – if uncertain assume the effect(s) are significant).</p> <p>If the answer is 'yes' to any of the questions below, then the effect is significant.</p> <p>(Please justify your answer. 'Yes' / 'No' alone is insufficient)</p>	
Would there be...	
... any impact on an Annex 1 habitat? (Annex 1 habitats are listed in Appendix 1 of AA Guidance).	Not likely due to the location and type of development. The site is sufficient distance from the European Site. (11km)
... a reduction in habitat area on a European sites?	There will be no reduction in the habitat area.
... direct / indirect damage to the physical quality of the environment (e.g. water quality and supply, soil compaction) in the European sites?	Not likely due to the location and type of development. The site is sufficient distance from the European Site (11km)
... serious / ongoing disturbance to species / habitats for which the European sites is selected (e.g. because of increased noise, illumination and human activity)?	Not likely due to the location and type of development. The site is sufficient distance from the European Site. (11km)
... direct / indirect damage to the size, characteristics or reproductive ability of populations on the European sites?	Not likely to have an adverse impact due to its location and characteristics
Would the project interfere with mitigation measures put in place for other plans / projects. [Look at <i>in-combination effects</i> with completed, approved but not completed, and proposed plans / projects. Look at projects / plans within and adjacent to European sites and identify them]. Simply stating that there are no cumulative impacts' is insufficient.	No.
(E) SCREENING CONCLUSION:	
Screening can result in:	
1	<i>AA is not required</i> because the project is directly connected with / necessary to the nature conservation management of the site.
2	<i>No potential for significant effects / AA is not required.</i>
3	<i>Significant effects are certain, likely or uncertain.</i> (In this situation seek a Natura Impact Statement from the applicant, or reject the project. Reject if too potentially damaging / inappropriate.
Conclusion:	Category 2
Justify why it falls into relevant category above:	Given the location and the nature and size of the development applied for and the characteristics of European sites in the vicinity and the appropriate assessment guidelines it is considered that the development will have no likely significant impacts on this European site.
Name:	Michael Mullarkey
Signed:	
Position:	Chief Technician
Date:	11-07-2024